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REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS

Letter dated 27 October 1994 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith information on the status of refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 99.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

ANNEX

Refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: drastic deterioration in the humanitarian situation

1. During the last four years, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has provided shelter to refugees from the former Yugoslav republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and Macedonia.

Protection to refugees and displaced persons in Yugoslavia is rendered in accordance with the standards and principles of the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Yugoslavia is a signatory party. In providing protection to refugees, Yugoslavia has observed all the basic provisions of international documents pertaining to the protection of the human rights of this category of people. In this context, article 4 of the Law on Refugees of the Republic of Serbia provides that, in addition to other rights, the Republic will guarantee the refugees the same international and legal protection it guarantees to its own citizens, which in itself is eloquent proof of the country's concern over the fate of refugees. Accordingly, refugees and displaced persons in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia enjoy all basic human rights, as well as some specific rights to accommodation and protection, to all types of education, material support, free medicine and medical treatment, to information, etc.

For quite a long time the international community has turned a blind eye to the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which resulted, among other things, from its hesitation to provide humanitarian assistance. As a consequence, the refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have been placed in an unequal and discriminatory position vis-à-vis the refugees in the other republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and that position has not yet been changed. Foreign Governments and many humanitarian organizations have not reversed their policy of sending humanitarian assistance to former Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia alone, in outright disregard of the plight and predicament of refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, however, has borne the brunt of the refugee crisis in these territories in the last three years. It has had sanctions imposed and the refugees have been their first and principal victims. Humanitarian assistance, although formally exempted from sanctions, is almost negligible. Its shipment to those in need in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been virtually stopped by the delaying tactics applied in the procedures of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 724 (1991) concerning Yugoslavia and "the work to rule" by relevant institutions in many donor and aid-transiting countries.

2. There are 440,000 registered refugees in the territory of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia today, 395,000 of them, or 4 per cent of the overall population, in Serbia and 45,000, or 7.3 per cent of the overall population, in Montenegro. About 200,000 refugees are from former Bosnia and Herzegovina, about 190,000 from Croatia, while 37,000 are from Slovenia and 3,000 are from

the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In terms of nationality, the preponderant part of the refugees are Serbs - 77 per cent in Serbia, while 35 per cent of the refugees in Montenegro are Montenegrins and 35 per cent are Serbs. Over 100,000 refugees are of other national origin (Muslims, Croats, Yugoslavs, Jews, Albanians, etc.). All refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, irrespective of their nationality or religion, enjoy the same rights and receive the same assistance.

The most vulnerable segments of the refugee population are children, who account for 42 per cent of the overall refugee population in Serbia and for 50 per cent in Montenegro. Women account for 58 per cent of the overall refugee population in Serbia and for 66.6 per cent in Montenegro.

Refugees continue to arrive in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Most of them are now coming from Croatia, in which the ethnic cleansing of large towns is currently under way. These people are subjected to various forms of pressure: they are being dismissed from jobs owing to their nationality, they are threatened in various ways and they are often evicted from their homes and apartments.

3. Some 95 per cent of the overall number of refugees have been accommodated within the families of friends and relatives or simply of unknown humane people. Consequently, the greatest part of the burden of refugee accommodation has been shouldered by the ordinary people of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, most of whom have had their own standard of living reduced to the subsistence level by the imposition of sanctions.

The sanctions have also depleted the economic and financial potentials of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the level that the country cannot help their own citizens in need. The accommodation of refugees has been a very severe additional strain on the country's limited resources, yet, considering the number of refugees, the circumstances in which it found itself upon the establishment of United Nations sanctions and the lack of international assistance, there is no doubt that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has done much more for refugees than any other former Yugoslav republic.

4. Bilateral arrangements, the dominant form of refugee assistance to the other republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, have accounted for a very small portion of the assistance to refugees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Almost exclusively, this assistance has been provided by international humanitarian organizations, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

In 1994, international humanitarian assistance has been drastically reduced compared with 1993. This assistance is currently less than 9 per cent of the real needs of the refugees. All forms of assistance have been reduced, from food to the heating oil for refugees accommodated both in collective centres and within families.

Currently, the refugees are in need of everything. The winter, which has already arrived, has further exacerbated the otherwise unbearable living conditions of refugees. Food, medicine, personal hygiene items, winter clothes and footwear are in short supply.

In the current situation, the lives of refugees depend most directly on the assistance to be provided by the international community since the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has exhausted all its resources.

In the opinion of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the principal way to solve the refugee crisis in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is the elimination of its causes peacefully and by cooperation. Committed to the respect of all human rights of refugees, Yugoslavia has persistently called for their voluntary return to their homes.